CHAPTER VII

FEMINISM AND FEMININITY
CHAPTER - VII

FEMINISM AND FEMININITY*

Premchand did not subscribe to the notion that art was a mere representation of reality. To him realism in art was Adarshomukhi Yatharthvad (idealistic-realism) which had an important social function: to contribute to the transformation of society by creating an awareness about the existing conditions and by projecting a vision of the future. Premchand's creative efforts were strongly imbued

* This Paper is a revised version of the paper published by the author published in Studies In History, 3, Ins (1987), pp.121-136.


2. 'Upayyas' in Kuchh Vichar, p.50; also see Vividh-prasang, Vol.III, Allahabad, 1978, p.35.

with this social commitment, which perhaps found the best expression in the manner in which he treated the problems of women in his fiction. In doing so he marked a definite break with the earlier literary tradition which placed women within the parameters of romantic chronicles. In contrast to the earlier tradition, Premchand conceived a new image of women in the context of

4. Before advent of Premchand there were, broadly speaking four streams of novel writing in Hindi: (i) Didactic fiction whose progenitor was Srinivas Das. The first work which can fairly be described as novel is Pariksha Guru by him; (ii) Romances, whose chief representative is Deviki Nandan Khatri; (iii) Social, Historical, supernatural tradition represented by Kishorilal Goswami; and (iv) Detective fiction represented by Gopalram Galmari.

Premchand can be placed in the tradition of Srinivas Das, Balkrishan Bhatt and Radhkrishan Das. Though some of these writers throw some light on women's problems but these problems are of secondary importance. These are not taken as principal themes. It is Premchand who "establishes the novel as an independent genre in Hindi."

the changes taking place in Indian society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the process, the 'persecuted maiden' emerged as a social being, a living critique of the male world, with a new dignity, a new confidence, a new self-view and with a vision of a new destiny.

The concern with the problem of women in Premchand's fiction can be broadly described as an effort to explore the various strands of feminism and femininity and their limitations and weaknesses in the socio-cultural situation obtaining in India.

5. By feminism, we mean, in loose sense of the term, the efforts to change the status of women, or ideas about women, or an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it.

The aim was not to offer a definite solution or an alternative but to highlight the complexities involved in the creation of an ideal situation for women. Even when an alternative was suggested there was considerable ambiguity. What was important in the myriad themes relating to women which formed the concern of his fiction was the dilemma faced by Indian women in a traditional society influenced by an alien culture. This chapter is an effort to examine some of the issues arising out of Premchand's treatment of this dilemma.
I

FEMINISM

(i) **Patriarchal Ideology and Woman's Situation:**

In a large number of works and short stories Premchand has tried to explore and expose the forces which engendered and perpetuated the oppression of women.

An important element in-built into the system of male-domination and female subordination in Indian society was the patriarchal ideology. 6

6. Adrienne Rich defines Patriarchy as:

"The power of the fathers : a familial-social, ideological, political system in which man-by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male...under Patriarchy... Whatever my status or situation, my derived economic class, or my sexual preference, I live under the power of fathers, and I have access only to so much of privilege or influence as the Patriarchy is willing to accede to me... and only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval." - quoted by Hester Eisenstein, *op. cit.*, p.5.
This obviously had different strands, collectively exercising hegemonic control over the female mind, leading to the acceptance of her ascribed position. This is a theme which Premchand explored in great detail. In 'Kusum', for instance, the focus is on the complex manner in which familial, social, and cultural influences combined to ensure the subjection of a married woman through her own acquiescence. The emphasis was not on how women were coerced into accepting their secondary status, but on how they were conditioned into its acceptance. The protagonist of this story expresses thus:

...a woman starts dreaming about her man from the moment she begins to think cogently. I also did the same...You have been with me from my childhood. These feelings have entwined with my very being...I was brought up in an environment where the essence of a woman's life is devotion to her husband. And not even envy or jealousy can drive out this feeling from my heart. I am the guardian of your kul-maryada and prestige.7

7. 'Kusum' in Mansarovar, Vol.II, Allahabad, 1978, pp.18-19. This and the other translations from Hindi, unless otherwise mentioned, are by the author.
This self-image was obviously derived from the position ascribed to her by society and unconsciously internalised by her.  

---

8. Branka Magas sums up the views held by Kate Millett about Patriarchal family:

"The Patriarchal family is the agent of the Patriarchal order in that it socializes the individual along the stereotyped lines of sexual categories. But the family does more than that: it educates the child to fit into the existing social structure and its authority, system of values, modes of relation between people, attitudes to Property etc. All these become the very foundation of the individual personality because, from a strategic point of view, the family is extremely well placed: it seizes the individual from the very moment of its birth."


(b) Pushpa in Mangalsutra protests: "Tradition, ideals and god knows what other excuses are used by you--(men)---to exploit and dominate us." In Premchand Samiriti, p.271. And Tibti another educated woman in this novel says: "The men have not left any shelter for women. The ideals of exclusive devotion (fidelity) to her husband have been stuffed into their minds this much that they have been denuded of any sense of individuality. They can live only under the protection of men. They have no independent existence." Ibid, p.283.
was the differentiation based on sex which began even before birth. Every child conceived was hoped to be a boy, even if it was after the birth of seven sons. The girl was thus unwelcome before her very birth, for her birth was wrought with problems for the parents. She was looked upon as a burden and brought up only to be married off at the earliest possible opportunity. The *biredari* was ever watchful about any false step and if a grown up girl remained at home, the parents became "the laughing stock in the whole community." No such stigma was attached to unmarried boys.


Premchand emphasised this unwantedness to highlight a woman's helplessness when she was transferred to her husband's household. Marriage to her was not an escape from the patriarchal world, but only a transition to a harsher one. It subjected her to life-long tyranny. She was now called upon to discharge several roles: wife, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law. In all these roles she was subjected to all forms of violence. Her own interests, personality and feelings were subordinated to the needs of the family.  

The enslavement to the authority of the husband was the worst form of tyranny in the Hindu Community. Premchand compared it with that of an absolute ruler over his subjects or a slave-owner over his slaves. The wife was either a sandal or a doll to a man to be used or rejected according to his whims. This is how


the women in 'Thakur Ka Kuan' perceived their positions:

They (men) just order us to get it (water) as though we were slaves?

If you're not a slave, what are you? You work for food and clothes and even to get nothing more than five and six rupees you have to snatch it on the sly. What is that if it is not being a slave? 16

The whole existence of women revolved around their husbands. 17 In fact the sole justification for their life rested on male approval. A true woman was one who accepted and internalized the view of herself dictated by male dominated society and the social and cultural norms it set. 18 The 'true woman' was consigned only to sexual and familial functions and was excluded from defining and shaping the destiny of her own life. 19 A true


17. See 'Abhushan', op.cit, pp.144-45; Kayakalap, p.298.


19. See Mangalsutra, op.cit, p.274. Pushpa realizes that she will have to sacrifice her own individuality in her husband's personality in this house. There was no chance for her to develop her own self, her own soul. In fact she will have to dance to her husband's tunes." p.274.
or authentic woman was thus one who committed herself to a man for the sake of receiving not only his name but the legitimacy derived from his power, status and accomplishments. Thus she was authentic, legitimate and real only to the extent she satisfied the criteria of femininity. She was identified with the male, in fact, with the very person who denied her a personality of her own.

The male-dominated familial culture transformed a woman to an 'object' whose prime utility was as a source of sexual gratification. Sex-roles and sex-role stereotyping were the means by

---

20. See Prem Ki Vedi, pp.5,8. Jaini, the protagonist of this play rightly points out "Man cannot forgive her for being herself. A woman does not dare utter a word against a man who is out and out wicked. It is her bounden duty to regard her man as her god."; also see 'Lanchan', Mansarovar, Vol.V, pp.120-148.

21. See Kayakalap, op.cit, p.269. Chkaradhar attributes the degradation of women "to the doctrine that woman is sex and beyond that nothing; also see Kerambhumi, op.cit, p.67; also see Prem Ki Vedi, op.cit, p.23;
Lady Doctor Wilson upbraids Yograj for regarding his wife as an object of sex: "You have also committed this same folly which your brothers are prone to commit. A woman for you is merely an object of sex for them. They can inflict any tyranny on women and turn enemies to any woman who may perchance do something unpleasant to them. The poor soul is prepared to tolerate anything to keep her husband happy. I watch this in every house."
which women were subjected to the rules of patriarchy. Any departure from their prescribed roles was immediately discountenanced by society. A woman could not break any one of them without being an outcast in society. She therefore had no way to realize herself, nor did society recognize her as a person. Her worth, as one of Premchand's characters said, was 'neither comprehended in her parents' home nor in the home of her husband. Consequently she

---


23. Man enforces the double-standard on all the aspects of women's life. A man, at least, is free: He can explore all passions, taste of the most distant pleasures turn up late at night but a woman is not allowed even to step out of the house without the permission of her husband. If she, perchance, happen to come late at night she is suspected of infidelity, as in the case of Suman in Seva-Sadan and Maryada in "Nirvasan". Woman is not forgiven whereas a man in similar situation is forgiven by the society.


24. See Mangalsutra, op.cit, p.274.

25. 'Kusum', op.cit, p.19; also see Pratigya, op.cit, p.32.
hardly had any means to satisfy her urges. Ineffective and isolated, she sought consolation in the elaboration of roles ascribed to her: the roles of wife, of daughter-in-law and mother. As a wife she was constantly engaged in increasing her physical charms and thus heightening her sexual attraction for the husband. As a daughter-in-law she became the custodian of the family tradition with the responsibility to preserve it even at the risk of her life. The sole responsibility of rearing up the children devolved upon her as the mother.

26. The constraints that surround women and the whole tradition that weighs her down prevent her from doing something meaningful. As Simone de Beauvoir points out:

"It is because they are nothing that many women sullenly confine their interests merely to their egos and inflate them so greatly as to confound them with everything... Ineffective, isolated, woman can neither find her place nor take her own measure; she gives herself supreme importance because no object of importance is accessible to her."

Second Sex, Penguin, p.641.

In fact Premchand's women characters persist in the vain pursuit of their true being through their love of garments, jealousy, religious and social superstitious practices. They repeatedly have to repress their emotions and impulses due to social codes not of their own making. Humiliated, mortified by male rebuffs, they may not answer, but burst into tears. See Premasharam, Gaban, Kayakalap, "Narak Ka Marg", Op.cit., Nirmala, Vardan and Sevasadan. Nirmala is a sombre tale of suffering of a young woman unrelieved by any gleam of hope.
(11) Equal Rights for Women

Salvation from this generalised and universalised system of tyranny, in Premchand's reckoning, could be achieved only through equal rights for women in society. This could be discerned in his non-fictional writings too: he appealed to men to grant equal rights to women; and at the same time exhorted women to rise from their passivity and indifference to break the chains which enslaved them.27

Premchand felt nostalgically of the time when Indians had been devoted to their mothers. Devotion to mother "had been major aspect of their religion."28 But he deplored over the fact that the same Indians have reduced women to the status of second-class citizens. In the existing situation "woman has no succour how soever blameworthy, licentious and cruel man may be."29 Therefore, he appealed to men


to restore to women their pristine dignity and respect.  

Time has come when "men should disabuse themselves of any illusions of ruling the world by themselves, since whether they like it or not, women will not sit idle till they secure their rights." The women would secure their rights, firstly, because it is now "being conceded that men and women should have equal rights", secondly, as the education is spreading amongst them they are "increasingly becoming aware of their down-trodden state." Men had an excuse to deceive themselves till women suffered all their woes in silence. They could say "our faithful wives are so abiding in their duties towards their husbands that they would suffer the tyrannies of their men without rancour." Even at present most

33. Ibid, p.258.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
of "our sisters are of the same views."\textsuperscript{36} But now women are rebelling against their subservient conditions and "men will have to come to terms with them."\textsuperscript{37} They can no longer "save their manhood from ignominy."\textsuperscript{38} Despite his appeal to men to concede the genuine rights of women, he believed that ultimate emancipation was possible only through the self-activity of women which would call for considerable self-sacrifice, as he told his wife:

\begin{quote}
Rights are too precious. You have first to sacrifice for them. Even if you get something for nothing it would neither be good nor last long. Hard earned possessions are worth having...Those who have not so far been able to treat women as equals cannot be expected to be generous all of a sudden.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Premchand urged that women should have equal rights with men in every sphere and "it should

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Shivrani Devi Premchand, \textit{Premchand Ghar Me}, Delhi, 1956, p.122.
\end{itemize}
be left to women what rights to choose in their own interest." In other words his emphasis was on creating a consciousness among both men and women, a task which he attempted through his fiction.

There were two means by which women became aware of the effects of male domination. Conscioussness was first born out of the nature of their oppressive conditions and second out of the role of new ideas. In the former the growth


In an article titled 'Kumari Shiksha Ka Adarsh' written in January, 1934, to criticise Mr. McKauzie's speech advocating different education for girls and boys, Premchand wrote, "The problem is that men have oppressed women so much that they (women) no longer want to be mothers and wives, instead, they insist on acquiring economic independence. If men do not know that how to rear children or cook meals, why should women learn to do so? Women want the same kind of education that gives men the ability to go out and earn a living and then treat their women as slaves. Why should they (women) cook? Why should not they practice law or teach at school? Our women should decide the kind of education they want for their daughters. Why should they accept the decision made by selfish men?" Ibid, p.266.
of consciousness was not the result of any outside agency but was born out of their oppressive conditions, as in the case of Indu in Rangbhumi, Suman in Sevasadan, Sumitra in Pratigya, Kusum in 'Kusum' and numerous other stories.\(^1\) The growth of this consciousness was through a slow and continuous struggle against the influences of patriarchal ideology, achieved through several stages. The beginning was through introspection about the condition in which they were forced to live. "Why do I bear all these sufferings", asked Suman, "Only to abide by restrictions imposed by Society."\(^2\) It is followed by a realization of the misplaced faith in men and finally a total break. Indu in Rangbhumi is a good example of this awareness. Before leaving her husband's house she protests against the manner in which she was used by her husband, "you want to

\(^1\) Since one of the features of Patriarchy is its very invisibility, its ability to masquerade as 'the natural' that these women felt no need to resist their own degradation. But seeds of rebellion take roots in them steadily. This expertise stemmed from their authority of experience. A woman knew something to be true because she lived through it.

\(^2\) Sevasadan, Allahabad, 1979, p.34; Also see Pratigya, p.97. Sumitra in this novel justifies her misbehaviour to her husband: "After all why should I be brow-beaten by him? Had he even spoken to me with love I would have put up with his threats as well. But how is one to tolerate a man who is always brandishing his sword?"
make me dance like a puppet, now this way and then that way. I have married you. I have not sold my soul to you. 43 Passivity and indifference were thus overcome leading ultimately to the triumph over their subservient conditions. 44

43. Rangbhumi, Delhi, 1980, p.183.

44. Ibid; also see 'Abhushan', op.cit, pp.147-48; 'Kusum', op.cit, p.24.

Thus Kusum in the story 'Kusum' achieves this realization when she comes to know that her husband had been indifferent and cruel to her just because her father could not procure enough dowry to enable him to pursue higher education abroad. Her father raises a loan to fulfill his son-in-law's desire but the moment Kusum comes to know of this fact, a sudden realization dawns upon her consciousness and she forbids her parents to send this money to her husband because she feels "it is plainly a dacoity." It is like "forcibly taking away a person from his house" says she "and then demand a fat amount for his ransom." Her mother reminds her that her "god has come round at last after so many days" and she is again "irritating him". But this same Kusum who had been pining away for her husband's love cries in angry tone: "It is better to have such god annoyed. I can't put up with a man who is so selfish, arrogant and mean. If you send money there, I'll take poison. I warn you. Please don't take it lightly. I don't want to see such a man. I have decided to remain independent." Op.cit, p.24.

Also see 'Nairashaya Leela', Mansarovar, Vol.III, 54-67. It is an exposition of the sad plight of a child-widow. The parents of the child-widow try to provide diversions for her. This invites comments from the neighbours. The helpless widow then takes refuge in religion and renunciation of earthly things and becomes a sanyasi; but here too she is made subject to public criticism. She then takes recourse to social work. She opens a school and starts ministering to a seriously ill-child. But her father closes the school as it means her keeping away from home and the resultant jibes of the community. Exasperated, she cries out in anguish, "Tell me, so long as consciousness abides with me how can I become inert? It is beyond my power to consider myself a pathetic creature. Let the community say what they will, I don't care. I can keep my self-respect...I feel humiliated on being suspected at every step. I can't stand this for long."
Another important factor in "consciousness-raising" was the role of ideas. Premchand has used the medium of women's club to demonstrate this. The liberation of Meenakshi in *Godan* from her libertine and alcoholic husband is a good example.

The liberation from male-domination had important consequences for the personality of women. The transformation in Kusum is narrated thus:

One is surprised to see how firmly self-sufficient she has become. In place of the pallor of despondence and agony, what one discerns on her face is the resplendent pink of self-confidence and freedom.

---

45. See *Godan*, *op.cit.*, pp.393-394. About the members of this club, Premchand comments:

"There was lots of talk amongst them about voting and rights, freedom and female enlightenment, as though they were creating some deadly weapons to use against the men. Most of the women were ones who didn't get along with their husbands, who had received a modern education and as a result wanted to break down ancient traditions. There were also several young ladies who had earned college degrees and now, considering married life a destroyer of self-respect, were searching for jobs. One of these was a Miss Sultana, who had returned after being admitted to the bar in England and was now employed in giving legal advice to women kept in seclusion."


47. 'Kusum', p.24.
(iii) ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

The emancipation from male-domination was not without its immediate hazards. Was it possible for women to live without protection from immediate harassment in a male-dominated society.48

---

48. Once a young woman had her freedom, where was she to go, and what was she to do with it? It is true family relationships often confined women but they also provided a sort of protection and support that women had great difficulty finding elsewhere. Thus the question of protection is debated among two female characters in Pratigya:

Sumitra questions her friend Purna, "sister, can you understand, why does man boss over woman?" Purna said with a mysterious smile, 'It is not a recent development. Why shouldn't man rule woman when he has always shielded her?... The question is of protection. Who will protect her?'

Sumitra: What protection? Is someone going to gobble them up?

Purna: The libertines will make their lives difficult.

Ibid, p.93.
The obvious place of shelter for them was their parents' home. However, Premchand does not follow this obvious solution but explores the possibilities of an independent course of life as in the case of Suman in Sevasadan.

---

49. This applies only to women belonging to lower middle and middle castes and classes. The women belonging to lower castes and classes could work and feed themselves. This has been brought out in stories like 'Saut', in Gupat-Dhan, Vol.II, Allahabad, 1978, pp.228-236; and 'Subhagi', Mansarovar, Vol.I, Allahabad, 1980, pp.257-266. These stories demonstrate that women are capable of transcending their inferiority which is man-made and that women both mentally and physically are not inferior to men.

But the only alternative left to women belonging to middle classes was to return to their parents' home. But parents generally delivered long lectures on docility, sacrifice and duty to their daughters, when the latter decided to lead independent lives. See Sumitra's remarks in Pratigya, p.32.

50. Suman having liberated herself from her husband's authority is faced with a new set of problems. She is refused shelter everywhere. She thinks of establishing a household by herself but then she risks sexual harassment. Therefore, Suman is forced by circumstances to take to prostitution. She finds this the only alternative to achieve liberty.
This was possible only if women were economically independent: for their subjection was rooted in economic dependence on men. Maryada in 'Nirvasan' tells her husband: "You are throwing me away only because you are the owner of the house and you think that you are feeding me." The solution therefore was to be independent of men through work. Economic independence, however, was not an end in itself

51. Mansarovar, Vol.III, p.52; 'Thakur Ka Kuan', op.cit., p.72; Pratigya, p.93; Purna and Sumitra in Pratigya discuss economic dependence:

Purna: Man earns and feeds. Why should not, then, he show his impudence?

Sumitra: Enough, you have said the best thing. I too feel that way. Poor woman, she cannot earn and is humiliated.
but a means to achieve emancipation. 52

52. Govindi in Godan, who tries to free herself from her family to shape an independent life, soliloquizes "she'd live off the sweat of her own brow and then no one could lord it over her". p.239.

On the question of the importance of economic independence for women, Simone de Beauvoir remarks:

"It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separates her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. Once she ceases to be parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator,


Jean Leighton quotes Simone de Beauvoir in Simone De Beauvoir on Women, England, 1975, p.42:

"To earn one's own living is not an end in itself; but it is only in this way that one can attain a substantial inner-freedom... To sustain oneself materially is to feel that one is a complete person."
(iv) **NEW WOMAN**

Did the liberated independent woman necessarily project the image of the new woman? To this rather complex question Premchand does not suggest a simple or mechanical solution. On the contrary he seemed to be conscious of the innumerable contradictions inherent in a transitional situation.

Premchand invests these 'new woman' with knowledge which to them is a means to liberate them from material and intellectual enslavement to men. They embody the feminist ideals of independence, freedom of spirit and strength of character. They believe in the virtue of male-female equality and attack the

   Also see *Prem Ki Vedi*, op.cit, p.7; *Mangalsutra*, op.cit, pp.270, 271, 283.
double-standard enforced by men. They demand sincerity in exchange of sincerity and refuse to compromise on this issue. These new women are cognizant of the fact that chivalry or respect shown by man to woman is just an expression and reinforcement of sex-role

55. See 'Suhag Ka Shav', Mansaro var, Vol.V, p.221. Thus Subhadra's "rebellious spirit" refuses to accept the dictum that "just being a male absolves 'him' from all the wrongs"; Also see Prem Ki Vedi, op.cit, p.7; Karambhumi, op.cit, pp.167-68, Here Sukhada feels indignant over the double-standard adopted by male-dominated society. She is not prepared to accept that howsoever a man may commit injustice upon a woman and the later may go on bearing it. She says gone are those days when women considered their husbands gods.

Also see Mangalsutra, op.cit, pp.270, 271, 283;
Pushpa, in this novel, argues with her husband "If I am dependent on you then you too are dependent upon me. Tell me, if I did the same amount of work I do in your house for someone else, for a wage, would I not be able to support myself? Then, whatever I'd earn would be mine. Here, even if I keep myself working, I have no right over anything. You can throw me out of the house whenever you wish." p.270.

stereotyping. As Jaini in *Prem Ki Vedi* remarks:

Man pretends to show high respect to woman by offering her a better seat in car or taking the initiative in saluting her, but it is only a matter of hollow etiquette. Man knows too well that he has snatched away from woman her precious possession and that howsoever accommodative he may be towards her, she will not be able to make good her loss. The possession lost by woman is her freedom.57

They have realized that women's subjection to the will of men is caused by the hegemony of dominant traditional values and institutions.58 Therefore, these institutions are subjected to severe criticism.59 In fact they rebel against their parents' authority on the question of supersitious customs engendered by the traditional institutions.60 They feel that these traditional values have to be replaced by the new ones.61 They look down upon the virtues

58. See *Mangalsutra, op. cit.*, pp.271, 283. Pushpa and Tibti express these views.
60. See *Rangbhumi*, Delhi, 1980, pp.31-32.
61. See "Do Sakhia", *op. cit.*, p.221. As Padma writes to her friend Chanda "The masonry has rotten and mere plastering won't do. A new wall will have to be constructed afresh."
traditionally associated with women, that is, docility, submissiveness and passivity because these values they perceive have no relevance in the modern times. 62

However, it is the institution of marriage, which they believe binds women to endless servitude, is subjected to fierce criticism. 63 Marriage, therefore, is considered an obstacle to their self-development. 64 It is the position of wife as 'unpaid domestic labourer' and traditional sex-roles within marriage and the family that comes under the heaviest and most frequent fire. 65 In fact marriage as an institution becomes

63. See Prem Ki Vedi, op.cit, pp.5-11.
64. As Jaini in Prem Ki Vedi says to her mother: "I feel those women should get married who have no personality, enthusiasm or ideal. But those who have their own ideas, personality, will power and desire for appreciation and fame should remain unmarried. To merge my entity with that of my husband is a great sacrifice which I can not make." Ibid, p.10.
a target of mockery. If compelled by their mothers to marry the men chosen by them (their mothers) these women simply reject their suitors by putting forward certain conditions which allow them to have their emotional independence after marriage. Thus Jaini in *Prem Ki Vedi* puts these conditions before William, her suitor:

Jaini : My first condition would be to ask you to get out of the house the day I see you talking to another woman.

William : (Gleefully) Yes, I agree, Jaini.

Jaini : My second condition would be to have, after marriage the right to talk with anyone, go anywhere I like and love anyone I desire. Tell me, do you agree?

William : How can it be possible, Jaini? You are joking. If a man dares even look at you then I would bury him alive.

Jaini : Then you are not the one for me.

---

66. Jaini in *Prem Ki Vedi* exposes the large lies of the conventional marriage. She questions William, her suitor, why does he want to marry? And William replies "because everyone desires to get married". Jaini explains the causes of his desire to get married:

(a) "You want to get married only to have a toy to entertain you at home";

(b) "You want to get married so that when I, clad in a nice saree, ride the motor-cycle with you, people may say happily "There goes the lucky Mr. William.";"

(c) "So that when you invite your superiors to a banquet, I please them with flattery and they may promote you";

(d) "So that you may father children to be successors to whatever little wealth you have amassed."

67. *Ibid*, p.27.
These women try to evolve a new code of love and marriage, a code which would involve equality of sexes, a code of shared ideals and companionship, without however, binding them against each other's will. Jaini says:

In my view marriage is a spiritual relation. It is sinful to entangle it in tradition. Marriage is a meeting of two hearts. To tie up a man and a woman in the bonds of tradition is like harnessing two hearts with a rope. A relationship which has foundations in the fear of society and religion can never give happiness. The basis of happiness is not bondage but freedom. Love also wants to be free like the flow of a river. Obstructions create vermin in it and it becomes fetid. I feel love becomes lifeless when restrained by bonds - like a plant dying for want of sun-light. I can stay here throughout the night of my own free will but if someone closes the door I would be anxious to escape immediately.

This was an ideal beset with too many thorns even if the woman was economically and sexually liberated, for human beings could not possibly exist without emotional bonds. The implication of this are explored in 'Miss Padma' and in 'Do Sakhia'. In them a discord between ideas and feelings.

thought and deeds, intentions and results, lofty aims and mundane behaviour are clearly discernible.

Padma is an economically and sexually liberated woman. She suggests to her lover, Prasad, that he come over and stay with her in her bungalow. They enter into a pact to respect each other's independence and to live together in the same house. Yet she looked upon him as "the master of my heart, my lord and master, my husband." But Padma soon realizes the futility of such an arrangement. While she was in hospital after giving birth to a child, Prasad deserted her to go on a tour of Europe with one of his young girl students. Padma feels

---

70. She is a well-established lawyer and has amassed wealth. She "had nothing against the pleasures of love, but she was against the subjugation of women, and she loathed the debasement of marriage into a business. She felt it was infinitely better to remain single and enjoy the delights of unencumbered existence. She had no moral compunctions about sexual indulgence; to her it was merely a hunger of the body." — Translation of the passage from Nandini Nopany & P. Lal, *Twenty Four Stories*, Delhi, 1980, p.134.

miserably let down possibly because that was the time when she needed emotional security and support of her lover. The story ends on the following note:

A month passed. Padma was standing by her bungalow gate with her baby son in her arms. Her anger had subsided into a grief-stricken hopelessness. Her feelings for the infant alternated between pity and love and loathing. She saw a European couple going out for a stroll with their baby in a Perambulator. She looked at the happy husband and wife with poignant longing, suddenly her eyes brimmed with tears.72

Through the dilemma of Padma Premchand seems to suggest that economic independence, although necessary, was not sufficient for female emancipation.73 Padma was caught between her desire

72. Ibid, p.139.

Simone de Beauvoir states:
"We must not believe, certainly, that a change in women's economic condition alone is enough to transform her, though this factor has been and remains the basic factor in her evolution; but until it has brought about the moral, social, cultural and other consequences that it promises and requires, the new woman cannot appear. At this moment they have been realized nowhere; in Russia no more than in France or the United States; and this is why the woman of today is torn between the past and the future." - Second Sex, op.cit, p.734.
to be independent and the 'femaleness' that
stirred within her. She seemed unconventional
but beneath her unconventionality she really
was conventional. She was not traditionally
feminine in the sense of being docile and sub-
missive. She was original, intelligent, and
economically independent, yet she was a victim
of emotional fragility. She was psychologically
dependent on her man and the loss of his
emotional support seemed to cripple her. 74 This
dependency rooted both in culture and feminine
psychology was not realized by Padma when she
made the arrangement with Prasad. But it soon
caught up with her.

74. Padma expects her raison d' etre, her value
and her very being from man.

Jean Leighton's remarks on this are
very pertinent: "To live for love, even
the most exalted, entails a kind of slavery
and self-debasement because of the ultimate
This theme is explored at a different level in 'Do Sakhia'. The heroine in this story married a man of her choice, believes in sexual equality and rejects conventional morality, yet she measures her husband against the standards of conventional norms of social behaviour: a man should give presents to his wife, get her new ornaments and clothes. That was her image of an ideal husband. Moreover, despite her commitment to equality she was prepared to submit to her husband's domination. What becomes evident here is the notion of the dominant male and the submissive female which was deeply imprinted on the Indian psyche. The liberation, Premchand demonstrates, is an extremely complex process in which the desire for independence and the internalised conventional social values are continuously in conflict.

75. She wrote to her friend, Chanda, about the traditions: "The masonry has rotted and mere plastering won't do. A new wall will have to be constructed afresh." - 'Do Sakhia', p.221.

76. Ibid, p.257.

77. As she wrote to her friend, Chanda, "I want that he should rule over me. I want to see his firmness, his impetuosity and his strength. I have had enough of his love, humour and confidence. It does not satisfy me." Ibid.
II

FEMININITY

For the resolution of this conflict, Premchand did not adopt the obvious and possibly the easier solution of rejecting the traditional cultural values. On the contrary, he tried to relate the process of transformation to the specificity of Indian culture, an effort in which his notion of femininity has a crucial place.

The idea of femininity, in Premchand, is embodied in the values women developed as a result of their association with the nurturing of children. These included love, sacrifice, devotion and non-violence, which were regarded by Premchand as the highest "ideals of the human race." Premchand's ideal of womanhood was based on these qualities:

My ideal for a woman is the concentration of sacrifice, service and purity at the one point: the sacrifice that expects nothing in return, the service that rendered

78. *Godan*, op.cit, p.199.
without any grudge and the purity
like that of Caesar's wife. 79

The women characters such as Virjan, Madhavi and
Chanda in Vardan; Shanta and Subhadra in Sevasadan;
Gayatri and Sheelmani in Premasharam; Sofia and
Rani Jahanavi in Rangbhumi; Manorama and Longi in
Kayakalap; Jalapa and Ratan in Gaban; Nirmala in
Nirmala; Prema in Pratigya; Naini in Karambhumi;
Siliya and Govindi in Godan; Kusum and Chanda in
'Do Sakhia'; Anandi in 'Tyagi Ka Prem'; Subhadra in
'Sohag Ka Shav'; Lajja in 'Har Ki Jeet'; Tara in
'Seva-Marg' and Mulia in 'Ghaswali' embody these
virtues. For these women love finds expression only
in service and sacrifice 80 which enables them to
transcend physical desires. 81 They believe that
"love is akin to devotion; the difference between
the two being only in quality. Devotion has more
of regard in it and love has more of sacrifice. 82

---

81. 'Seva Marg', op.cit, p.53.
82. Rangbhumi, op.cit, p.107.

Defining love to her lover and would be husband,
Chkradhar, Ahaliya says in the novel Kayakalap:
"Love is the expressionless, quiet and permanent
comingling of all the emotions of the heart.
Mixed in it are kindness and forgiveness, faith
and affection, sympathy and respect, attachment
and abnegation, solicitude and benevolence."
Ibid, p.216.
To them there cannot be love without dedication; they believed that 'giving' is nobler than 'taking.'


Thus summing up some of the common features of Premchand's female protagonists, Gita Lal points out:

"Service and affection are their basic nature and love is the foundation of their life. The woman's heart is made of the subtle principles of service...The life-principle of a woman is love and she is unmatched in her upholding of its highest ideal—self-sacrifice, unselfishness, absence of passions. In one sentence, woman is the visible image of service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, purity, love, affection, self-control, courtesy, pride and other beautiful and generous emotions."—Quoted by Robert O. Swan, Premchand of Lamhi Village, Durham, 1969, p. 99.

Therefore, woman in Premchand's works is attracted to a man because of his qualities, or in other words, she entrusts her love, her heart and her most precious possession to the deserving man in whom she perceives a reflection of her own noble emotions. In this regard she starts with having high regard for him, showering her devotion on him and eventually, her devotion metamorphoses into love. — See Rangbhumi, op. cit., p. 165; Vardan, Allahabad, 1980, pp. 28, 103-104, 116-120; Godan, op. cit.; 'Tyagi Ka Prem', Mansarovar, Vol. VI, pp. 33, 34; 'Vishwas'.

Thus Sofia in Rangbhumi is attracted by Vinay's noble qualities and when she perceives Vinay's transformation from non-cooperator to a cooperator of the authorities her faith in him is shattered. As she explains to him:

"I had not yielded myself to megalomania but to your service, sympathy and patriotism. I had made you the object of my devotion as you had a great ideal before your life, you had the kindness of the lord Jesus, the detachment of Lord Buddha and the truthfulness of Luther. You fell from your ideal when in pacifying the movement you preferred oppression and ruthlessness to peaceful means. This was the first attack of devil on you which you did not withstand and then you went on falling down. With one setback after another, you have fallen so low that not even an iota of nobility, sagacity and enterprise remains in you. My head used to bow of its own accord before you. My love was based on devotion. That base has been shaken. You have ravaged my life." — Rangbhumi, p. 349; Also see p. 270.

...Contnd.
These noble qualities are however not divorced from their relationship with male oppression. What enables women to resist oppression is their nobility of character. The superior qualities of women are highlighted not only to contrast with the cruelty and oppression of man but also to suggest that male violence can be overcome only through humane qualities.

Premchand's concept of marriage was also closely linked with these qualities he ascribed to women. He was very critical of the institution of marriage as prevalent in western countries and suggested that marriage in India was more noble, enduring and ideal. To emphasise

Sofia tells her brother: "Mr. Clark is not devoid of good qualities. He is worthy, well-behaved, generous and a good-hearted person. He is capable of making any woman who is interested in worldly pleasures, happy. But he lacks the feelings of self-sacrifice, service, high idealism, courage and self-agnegation.

83. - Contnd.

the superiority of Indian womanhood and marital relationship over the western, he made an European character testify to this:

We have regarded the relationship of men and women as a worldly thing. Its spiritual aspect has been miles from our thoughts. For this reason in our countries after centuries of progress, we cannot find such a shining and unworlly example of fidelity. And unfortunately our civilization has taken such a course that even in the distant future there cannot be the possibility of producing such women. If Germany is proud of its armies, France of its pleasures, and England of its business, India is proud of its women's faithfulness. Isn't it a matter of shame to the inhabitants of Europe, that such classical authors as Homer, Virgil, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, Hugo, were not able to create a single Sita or Savitri. In reality western culture is deprived of such ideals.85

The 'Spiritual ' as opposed to the 'material' was the basis of Premchand's concept of marriage. Marriage was regarded as a religious bond and its highest ideal was 'sanctity and stability'. 86


86. 'Sohag Ka Shav', op.cit, p.228; also see Premchand's review article of Pt.Ram Gopal Mishra's novel Chand Bhavan, Vividh-prasang, Vol.III, p.325.
In marriage love was akin to duty, and duty received precedence over everything else.\(^87\)

He underplayed the sexual element in love and marriage and dismissed it as animal instinct.\(^88\)

The aim of marriage, was, therefore, spiritual development and the way of realizing this was by service, since it was "the only cement" that could bind husband and wife together in lifelong love and companionship.\(^89\)

In order to highlight the bonds of Indian marriage Premchand counterposes the Indian and Western ideals. This is very effectively achieved through the thoughts of Gayatri in *Premasharam*. She comments on the strength of traditional Hindu culture which emphasises self-restraint, continence and suppression of desires. In contrast western culture is described as giving importance to the

\(^{87}\) *Savasadan*, op.cit, p.183.

\(^{88}\) *Karambhum*, op.cit, p.214; also see *Godan*, op.cit, p.184.

\(^{89}\) *Unmed*, op.cit, p.203; Also see Premchand's review article *Karvan*, *Vividh-Prasang*, Vol.III, pp. 374-378; also see *Haldi Ki Ganthhwala Pansari; Vividh-Prasang*, Vol.III, p.99.
expression of desires and the love of pleasure. She would prefer to be enchained by the ideals of Indian customs and traditions than to be enslaved by the western as in her view the latter would lead to moral degradation. The change in the attitude of a western educated woman in 'Do Sakhia' and 'Vishwas' is employed to further emphasise this point. Miss Joshi in 'Vishwas' is given to the way of the flesh. She is more involved with the cultivation of external beauty and the enjoyment of carnal pleasures. Through the influence of Apte she realizes the importance of cultivating the qualities of mind in preference to physical charm. Similarly Padma in 'Do Sakhia' having flirted with the western ideals of man-woman relationship finally realizes that "beauty may charm a person, but what gives joy to the soul is entirely different." She finds that ideal in dedication to higher values in life which opens a new chapter of nobility and affection in her life.

90. Premasharam, op.cit, p.179; also see 'Unmad', op.cit, p.125. Manhar in this story rejects western culture and returns back to his first wife. "I would keep away from that culture which does not know any other bond other than pleasures and luxury."; also see 'Dharam-sankat', Mansarovar, Vol.VIII, pp.38-45; 'Sohag Ka Shav', op.cit, pp.207-231; 'Shanti', Mansarovar, Vol.VII, Allahabad, 1979, pp.80-96.


92. 'Do Sakhia', op.cit, p.277.
Premchand also related love and marriage to the dominant values of society. His notion of man-woman relations was very much within the sanctioned societal codes. In his introduction to Bhagwati Prasad Vajpey's

93 That Premchand did not approve of extra-marital relationships is illustrated in the story 'Dharam-Sankat', op. cit, pp.38-45.
Also see Premchand to Jainendra, December 24, 1935, Chitthi Patri, Vol.II, pp.63-64. Here Premchand reacted to Jainendra's novel Sunita: "From the revolutionary point of view the marriage may be regarded as trifling but how can we underestimate the importance of social contract. A woman can continue to perform the roles of both a wife and a heroine and if her husband takes to debauchery (licentiousness) she can beat or disgrace him. But it does behave neither that revolutionary youth nor woman to indulge in adultery."

Also see Premchand to Usha Devi Mitra, April 6, 1936, Chitthi Patri, Vol.II, p.200.

Also see Premchand's review article, in Vividh Prasang, Vol.III, pp.374-378. Reviewing Karwan a collection of plays by Shri Bhuvneshwar Prasad, Premchand reacted to the depiction of the institution of marriage in the plays 'Shyama, Aik Vivahik Vidambana', "Shyama Aik Vivahik...Joewan', 'Partima Ka Vivah' and 'Ramon Romance' etc.

Reviewing the one-act play 'Shyama, Aik Vivahik Vidambana' Premchand attacks the writer's advocacy of love outside marriage. Premchand dubs this type of relationship a mere debauchery that is devoid of love. He points out here the "moment a man and a woman get married they accept the vow of fidelity to each other and the more they abide by it the happier their life would be." Ibid, p.376. In fact the "human feelings of mutual sacrifice and sympathy are bound to grow when a pair gets burdened by domestic responsibilities", Ibid, p.375.

It is in fact the real love and this can only be designated a married life." Ibid, p.376.

"The one who are idle, selfish, pleasure-seeking and who shirk from the responsibilities, are scared of married life." Ibid, p.376.

contnd...
Premchand wrote:

_The foundation of society rests on man-made taboos. Remove these and the society will crumble... It is natural for a man and a woman to fall in love but a liaison which is aimed not at marriage but only at satisfying lust is depraved. It is maligned and deserves so, otherwise the institution of marriage will be destroyed..._94

There was an obvious contradiction between the idea of female emancipation implicit in some of Premchand's works on the one hand and the ideal of womanhood he projected on the other. The former represented the feminist ideals of struggle against patriarchal ideology

93. - Contd.

Premchand advocated the complete sincerity, fidelity and devotion to each other in married life. Ibid, pp.376-377.


Here Premchand gives his reaction to Sardar Mohan Singh's short story 'Mere Master Sahib' incorporated in Vinod Shankar Vyas, ed., 'Madhukari'; also see Premchand's comments on 'Gramophone Ka Record', in Premchand to Jainendra, 7th Feb, 1935, Chitthi Patri, Vol.II, p.53.

Thus Robert O. Swan points out:

"A good character is not so much personally good as socially good... All strong human urges are sublimated to the presentation of Premchand's ideals for society. Love contains no sex... and sex is fictionally ignored. In place of dialogue of real lovers there is an exposition of ideal love." op.cit, p.107.
and the latter tended to extol virtues which had a patriarchal bias. It is not easy to offer an explanation for the dilemma. Yet, it may be

95. Premchand himself explained to Jainendra his conscientious abstention of emotions in his works. Jainendra records the following conversation with Premchand:

'I said - Bengali literature touches the heart more. Do you agree with this? What is the reason for this?'

Premchand replied - I certainly agree. The reason is that it is more feminine in feeling. I do not have enough of this.' Hearing this I stared at him.

I asked - Does it move the heart more because of its feminine quality? He said - Yes. It often becomes reminiscent. In memory there is the liquid quality of feeling. In resolve there is the hardness of feeling. For creativity one needs both. He continued - Jainendra, I do not know clearly. I am not a Bengali. They are emotional. I cannot go where emotions take you. I cannot give so much. You can reach with emotion where knowledge cannot take you. But I feel, Jainendra, that we need hardness also. Saying this Premchand blushed like a girl... He said - Jainendra, Ravindra and Sharat are very great, but is that the way for Hindi? -


In one of his letters to Imtiaz Ali 'Taj' Premchand wrote "I suffer from a specific weakness -and which is being intensified with ageing - that I am incapable of depicting scenes full of love and romance in my stories. Gone are those days..."

suggested more as a point of discussion rather than as a conclusion that this contradiction was rooted in the cultural compulsions of a colonial society. Faced with the intrusion of colonial culture and values, creativity in India increasingly tended to idealise traditional values and used traditional symbols as a means for revolutionising social consciousness. This emerged out of the need to create an alternate ideal derived from traditional culture as a counter to the colonial cultural hegemony. The contradictions, complexities and uncertainties in Premchand's women characters cannot be understood outside this historical context.

Despite the emphasis on traditional culture Premchand's general attitude towards the West was not of total rejection. His cultural perspective was syncretic and evolutionary. What he opposed was blind imitation which he regarded as a sign of mental weakness. He expressed it

97. He pointed this out to his wife in one of their conversations. See Shivrani Devi Premchand, Premchand Ghar Mein, op.cit, p.165. Also see 'Paryag Mahila Vidhyapeeth Ki Sahityik Pragati', Vividh-prasang, Vol.III, pp.245-246.
through one of his characters, Mehta, in Godan:

It saddens me to see our sisters adopting the ideals of the West, where women have surrendered their rightful position as mistresses of home and have fallen to a level where they are mere sexual playthings. The western woman wants independence so as to indulge herself fully in worldly pleasures... Blind imitation is a sign of mental weakness... The western woman...is sacrificing the modesty and dignity which is her crowning glory on the altar of frivolity and amusement...What greater degradation can exist for a woman.98

The rejection of the Western model which he thought rendered woman "a sex parasite" and not a free agent,99 was part of a quest to define the personality of Indian women. The sexual liberation, he felt, was not the same as female liberation; even in the west it had not


contributed towards changing the status of women. Therefore, instead of sexual liberation, Premchand advocated freedom for social activity, outside the four walls of the home. The creation of space for women in public life was considered an important factor in liberation.

100. See Barbara Bellow Watson, *A Shavian Guide to Intelligent Women*, London, 1964, p.81. She points out:

"The sexual revolution of the nineteenth century and the sexual counter-revolution of the twentieth century have made no radical change in the status of women. The divinity may have gone. The dream-world ideal of chastity may have been replaced by a dream-world ideal of lubricity. From the point of view of women's status, it does not matter what the sexual standards may be, for as long as they are regarded as defining her the real definition of her status is unchanged."
III

INTEGRATION OF FEMINISM AND FEMININITY

The familial, emotional and social world of women that Premchand presented was in fact a cross section of Indian society during his life-time. To that extent he was realistic, but his creative endeavour was strongly reformist. Therefore, his quest was to evolve a solution for the contradictions which were inherent in women's life situation in India, a quest in which he tried to integrate feminism and femininity. In the evolution of the relationship of Malati and Mehta in Godan such an effort is discernible.

Godan, published in 1936, is considered an epic of rural India. Yet, it has two inter-related themes - rural and urban and the man-woman relationship is an important part of both indirectly in the first and directly in the second. In interweaving these two themes Premchand perhaps wanted to contrast them, in order to highlight the simplicity of the rural woman and the complex situation faced by her urban counterpart.
The relationship between Hori and his wife Dhania is idyllic, a simple peasant relationship. The Mehta-Malti relationship, on the other hand, is focussed on the idealisation of human relationships, on the issue of the role of man and woman in bringing about a change in the society.

The development of Malati's character takes place in two phases. In the first she is a westernised woman, an ideal of woman's emancipation in the context of western culture:

She was the living image of modernity - expertly made up, delicate but full of life, lacking any trace of hesitation or shyness, a wizard at sharp repartee, an expert in male psychology, a connoisseur of the pleasures of life, and a master in the art of charm and enticement. In place of conscience she had glitter; in place of heart, coquetry. And she had put a strong block on her feelings that checked all desires and passions.101

She was a practising physician who had studied medicine in England. She was coquettish a quality from which she appeared to derive pleasure. She was an admirer of power based on wealth, in contrast to which "education and service and family and caste" did not matter at all. She

101. Godan, op.cit, p.76.
preferred the rich to the poor and her interest was primarily limited to the acquisition of wealth. 102

The character and personality of Malati underwent a gradual transformation through her contact with Mehta. In him she perceived a "more attractive image of manhood" than she saw in her previous circle of acquaintances. All the men she had met previously had "encouraged her sensual instinct", and none of them had tried to arouse her inclination for "service and sacrifice". 103 Mehta appealed to this Indian quality in her and she in her turn slowly but surely responded. In case of Mehta, too, Malati became a decisive influence. Until he met her he had spent most of his time in study and meditation. After carefully investigating various schools of philosophy, he had concluded that "the path of service, lying between those of activity and inactivity was the only thing that could make life meaningful and could elevate and ennoble it". 104

102. Ibid, p.179.
104. Ibid.
He saw the concepts of dualism and non-dualism as useless unless they had practical significance, and for him practical significance meant bringing human beings closer to one another, destroying their prejudices and strengthening their sense of brotherhood. 105

Having discovered this truth he set out to act without self-interest and to help and ameliorate the sufferings of those around him. 106

The ideals of sacrifice and selflessness Mehta advocated made a strong imprint on Malati's mind. She along with Mehta, starts going to villages, studies peasant women's problems and tends their children. She devoted herself entirely to the service of the poor:

She was beginning to discover the joys of a life of service...in the days of self-indulgence she had never known the pleasures and delight she experienced now in relieving the suffering of others. Those desires were like flowers which had faded away as the fruit appeared. She had passed beyond the stage where people consider gross pleasure as the greatest happiness. That pleasure now seemed superficial and degrading and rather disgusting. What pleasure was

105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
there in living in that big bungalow
when wails of distress seemed to be
rising from the mud huts all around?
Riding in a car was no longer a matter
of pride.107

The involvement with the problems of the
poor brought about an almost total transform-
ation in Malati. She now develops qualities
which were earlier suppressed in her. She
becomes gentle, maternal and sensitive. This
gives her a new sense of self-respect and
dignity and a new self-view. Mehta now becomes
her devotee. He becomes "an examinee rather
than an examiner."108 Her tenderness, motherli-
ness towards Gobar's child makes him realize
that Malati is not just "a beauty but a mother
too, and not just any old mother but a woman
and mother in the truest sense a giver of life,
who could consider another's child her own.109
Every inch of her "was bursting with motherli-
ness, as though this was her true nature and
all the coquetry and blandishments, the charms
and embellishments, had only been a protective

109. Ibid, p.408; also see "Mandir", Mansarovar,
Vol.V, p.5. Here Premchand extolled
motherhood.
The sight of Malati's maternal tenderness "brought tears to Mehta's eyes, and he felt like going in and clasping her feet to his heart." She appears to him now like "a planet in the heavens—an object of worship rather than of love." The happiness in love of which Mehta "had been dreaming was made still deeper and more exhilarating in devotion."

The relationship between Malati and Mehta was not of simple mutual acceptance, but a dialectical one out of which evolves a new concept

110. Godan, op.cit, p.408.
111. Ibid, p.409.
112. Godan, op.cit, p.411.
of love, based on higher values. It is love based on equality, shared ideals and companionship, but at the same time not seeking to make it an end in itself, but only as a means for achieving a higher goal in life. Malati had two higher goals in her mind: working for a feminist movement and the transformation of the entire society.

Even before she came in contact with Mehta, Malati had been very active in organising a "women's League". This League was founded for the purpose of struggling for women's rights. But after her transformation Malati devotes herself to the welfare of peasant women. Her aim was to give a new turn to the women's movement. Without sacrificing virtues like selflessness, sacrifice etc. she wanted peasant women to struggle for their rights:

Confronted by these devoted and selfless women, she felt herself to be petty and small. She knew a lot more than these villagers, being more aware of what was happening in the world, but she wondered whether she could live for even a day under the conditions in which these poor women were making a meaningful life for themselves. With no trace of

114. Ibid, p.196.
pride, they worked all day, went without food, wept, and still looked so cheerful. They had made others so much a part of themselves as to lose all awareness of their own existence except as it was found in their children, their husbands and their relatives. Nurturing such sentiments—enlarging the scope of such sentiments—would create an ideal of womanhood in the future. Considering the self-centeredness which had replaced such feelings in awakened women—everything for one's self and one's own enjoyment—they'd have done better just to remain asleep. Men were heartless, granted, but they were the sons of those mothers. Why was it that women didn't teach their sons to show reverence for mothers and for all women? Was it because the mothers had completely effaced themselves, losing all individuality, and didn't know how to give such instruction? No, self-negation was not the answer. In order to benefit society, women would have to defend their rights in the same way that these farmers had to sacrifice some of their saintliness to defend their lives.115

It is with this higher goal in her mind, that is the goal of transforming women's lives as well as the entire society, that Malati rejected the ideal of a traditional marriage with Mehta because she did not want to confine the soul of a man as intelligent and gifted as Mehta was in the "dungeon".

of marriage. When he proposed marriage, she rejected it, saying that the world needs dedicated men like him:

Fear, injustice and terror reverberate all over the earth. The fires of blind faith, religious, human and self-interest are raging. You've heard that cry of distress. If you won't listen, who will? But you can't turn a deaf ear the way corrupt men do. You'll shoulder the burden. You must push forward on that path with even more drive and enthusiasm in your intellect and learning, in your enlightened love of humanity and I'll follow behind.\(^{116}\)

Thus she subordinated her personal life to social concerns. They decided to live together as friends and work together for the transformation of the society. Malati embraced celibacy because it helped her to function in a space distinct from the traditional sphere of marriage and motherhood. It enabled her to avoid sexual and economic subordination and also gave her freedom to pursue social activities without any hindrances.

Thus in the person of Malati, Premchand defined a new concept of autonomy, meaning thereby a sense of self-direction and self-determination

---

\(^{116}\) Ibid, p.413, emphasis added.
that would grow in relation to, and with the help of, a sense of affiliation and connection with men, rather than in competition with them.\textsuperscript{117}

IV

Whether \textit{Godan} can be treated as a solution piece is doubtful. It only reaffirms the complexities involved in developing a modern view of man-woman relationship. By making Malati accept celibacy Premchand was in a way returning to square one.

The significance of Premchand's fiction in relation to the question of man-woman relationship is not from the point of view of an ideal he posits. Perhaps he had no such ideal in mind. Nevertheless, he brings out with great mastery the violence against women, examines the strength and weakness of femininism, underlines the subtle

\textsuperscript{117} As Premchand stated to his wife: "Remember! When women start thinking about themselves apart from men the world will be a nasty place to live in... Why should there be segregation of men from women? We can't thrive apart from women." - Shivrani Devi, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.122-123.
nuances of femininity and strongly suggests the importance of culture in the shaping of marital relationship. No writer in contemporary India has devoted so much attention to these problems as Premchand. He leaves the reader disturbed, though without any definite answer to the question he has raised.